

Fact Sheet: Grocery Stores Surveillance Update: 1993-1999

Teens at Work: Injury Surveillance and Prevention Project

Occupational Health Surveillance Program
Bureau of Health Statistics, Research and Evaluation
Massachusetts Department of Public Health
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Background

Grocery stores are the second most common place of employment for Massachusetts teens. In 1996, the midpoint of the surveillance period, approximately 12% of all employed 15-17-year-olds - more than 10,000 teens worked in grocery stores. Grocery stores are also the second most common place of occupational injury among teen workers in Massachusetts. Of the 3,389 injuries identified by the *Teens at Work Project* from 1993-1999, 13% occurred in grocery stores.

Gender

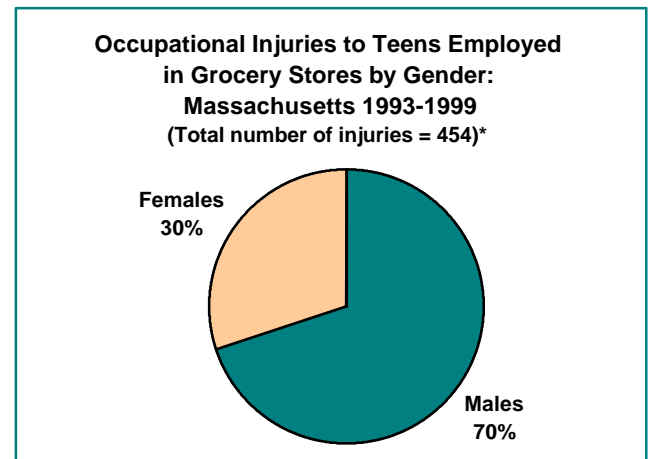
- Males made up slightly more than half (52%) of the teens employed in grocery stores during 1996, the midpoint of the six-year surveillance period (**Figure 1**).
- Seventy percent of all injuries to teen grocery store workers occurred among males (**Figure 2**).
- Young males are at higher risk for injury than young females working in grocery stores based on employment percentages for 1996. The difference is likely explained, in part, by the assignment of males to higher risk jobs within the grocery store industry.

Figure 1.



Source: U.S. Bureau of Labor Statistics,
Current Population Survey: 1996

Figure 2.



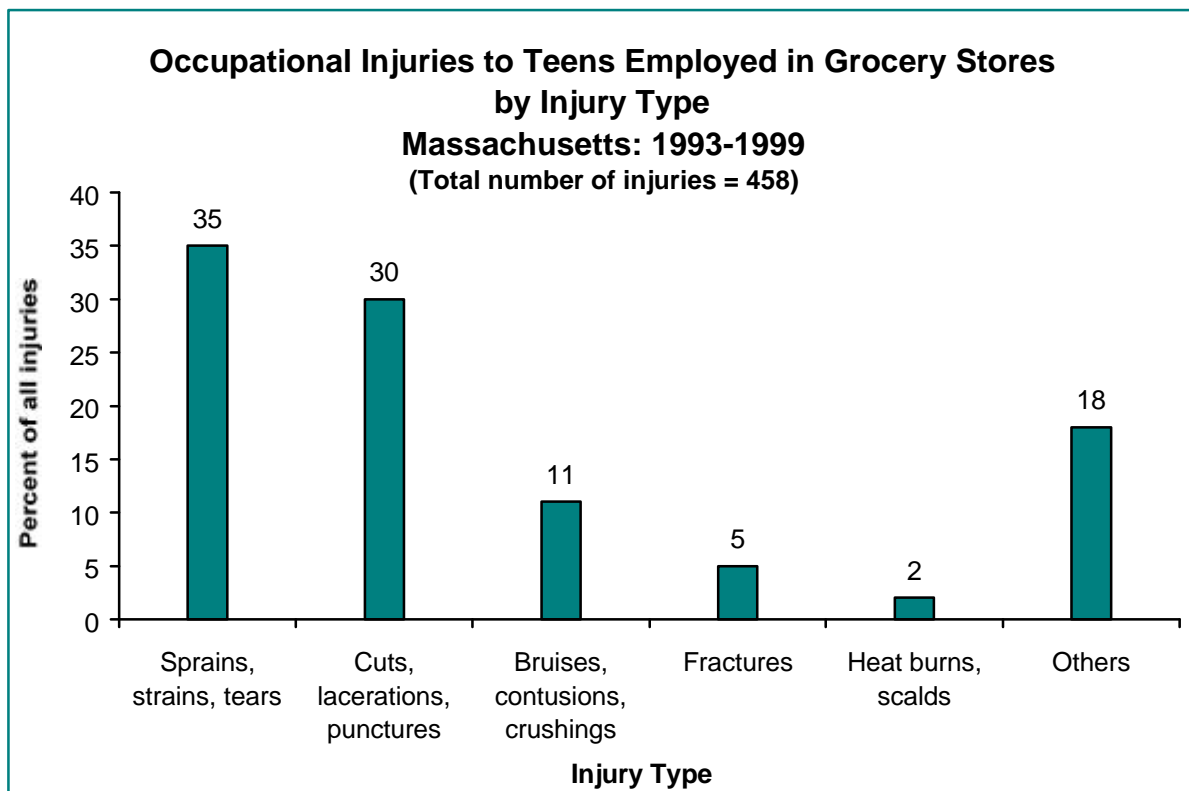
Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health
BHSR&E, OHSP

* Information on gender was unavailable for four cases.

Injury Type

- Sprains, strains, and tears were the most common types of injury sustained in grocery stores, accounting for more than one-third (35%) of all injuries to teen workers (**Figure 3**).
- The second most common types of injury sustained among teen grocery store workers were cuts, lacerations, and punctures (30%); followed by bruises, contusions, and crushings (11%) (**Figure 3**).
- Cuts, lacerations, and punctures were the injuries reported most frequently by hospital emergency departments, whereas sprains, strains, and tears were the injuries most frequently identified through Workers' Compensation claims. If all hospital emergency departments in Massachusetts reported cases to the surveillance system, cuts, lacerations, and punctures would be more predominant.

Figure 3.

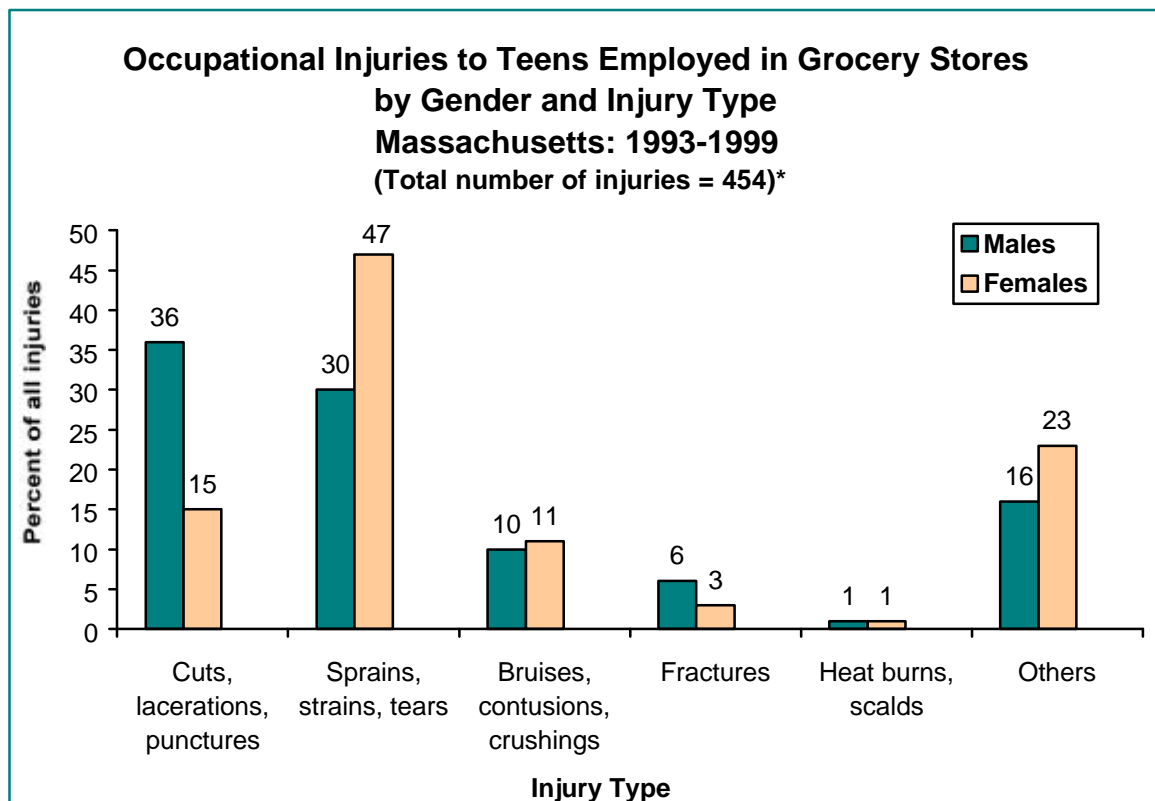


Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

Injury Type by Gender

- Injury type varied by gender for Massachusetts teens working in grocery stores. Cuts, lacerations, and punctures were the most common injuries reported among males, accounting for more than one-third (36%) of all injuries to males (**Figure 4**). Cuts, lacerations, and punctures only accounted for 15% of all injuries to females.
- Nearly half (47%) of the injuries to females were sprains, strains, and tears, compared to 30% for males.
- The injury distributions by gender do not necessarily mean that females are at a higher risk for particular injuries. Further research is needed to determine why the kinds of injuries sustained by young male workers differ from those sustained by young female workers. These differences might be explained, at least in part, by the different tasks assigned to young male and female workers.

Figure 4.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

*Information on gender was unavailable for four cases.

Sprains, Strains, and Tears

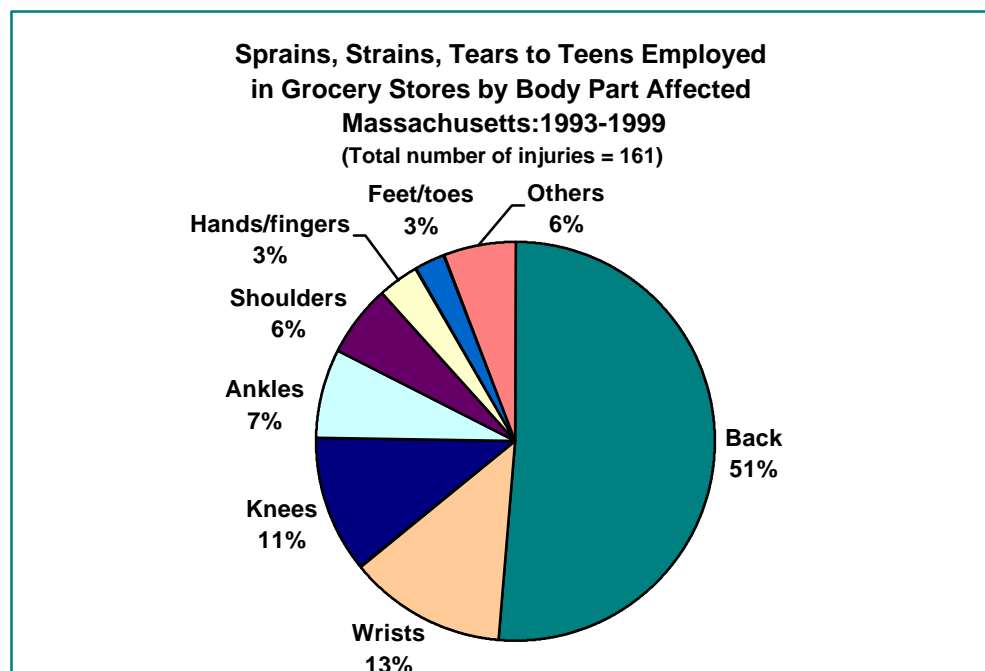
I had worked a 13-hour shift on Saturday. On Sunday morning my back was sore and after two hours at work it really hurt. I grabbed a back brace from the meat department and told my manager that I was in pain. He asked me to stay because we were short staffed that day. He told me not to lift anything anymore, but by 3 p.m. my back really hurt and I could barely walk. I drove myself home and went to see my doctor the next morning.

17-year-old stock boy

Child labor laws limit work shifts for 16- and 17-year-olds to a maximum nine hours per day.

- More than half of all sprains, strains, and tears affected the back (**Figure 5**). Back injuries are of particular concern because workers with back injuries may be at increased risk for subsequent back injuries.
- The lower extremities, including the knees (11%), ankles (7%), and feet/toes (3%), were affected in one-fifth of the cases.
- The upper extremities, including the wrists (13%), shoulders (6%), and hands/fingers (3%) were also affected in one-fifth of the cases.
- Descriptive information regarding circumstances of the injury was available for 89% (189) cases. Lifting and bagging groceries was listed as the cause of injury for 50% of these cases. Slips and falls were listed as the cause of injury for 10% of the cases, and retrieving carriages was listed as the cause for 6%.

Figure 5.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

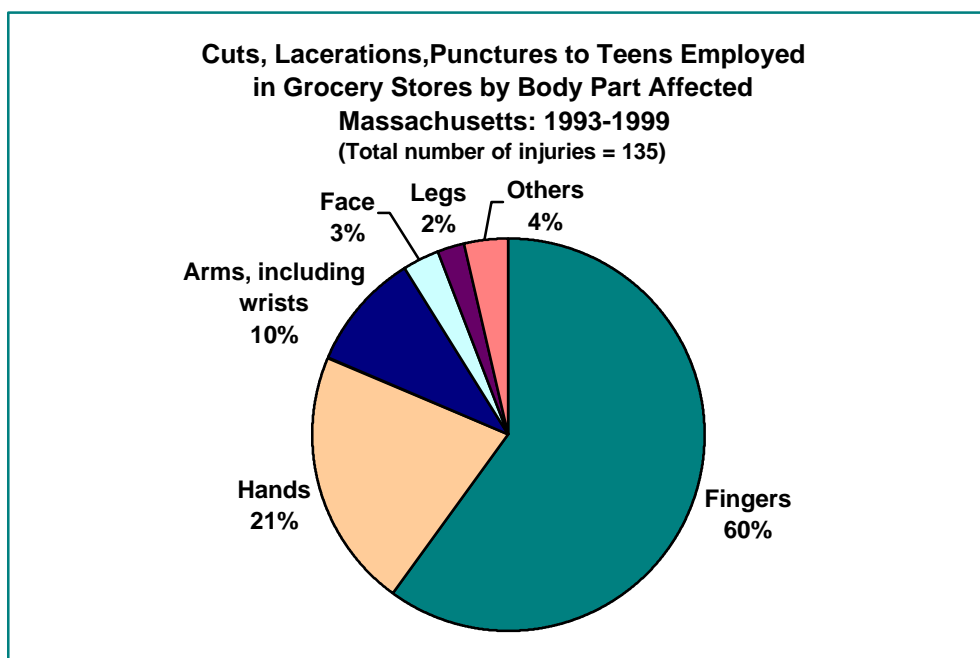
Cuts, Lacerations, and Punctures

I was using a box cutter to open a box. I was working quickly, so I could move on to another task. As I was cutting along the upper edge of the box (moving the cutter towards myself), I slipped and the box cutter cut my left hand. I washed my hand and then told my supervisor what had happened. Another employee then drove me to the hospital.

16-year-old grocery clerk

- The upper extremities, including the fingers (60%), hands (21%), and arms (10%) were affected in approximately 90% of the cases (**Figure 6**).
- Cuts, lacerations, and punctures affected the face in 3% of the cases.
- Descriptive information regarding the circumstances of injury was available for 68% (91) of the cases. Forty-four percent of the cases indicate that the injury was sustained while using a knife, razor blade or box cutter. Twenty-one percent of the injuries were sustained while opening a box.

Figure 6.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

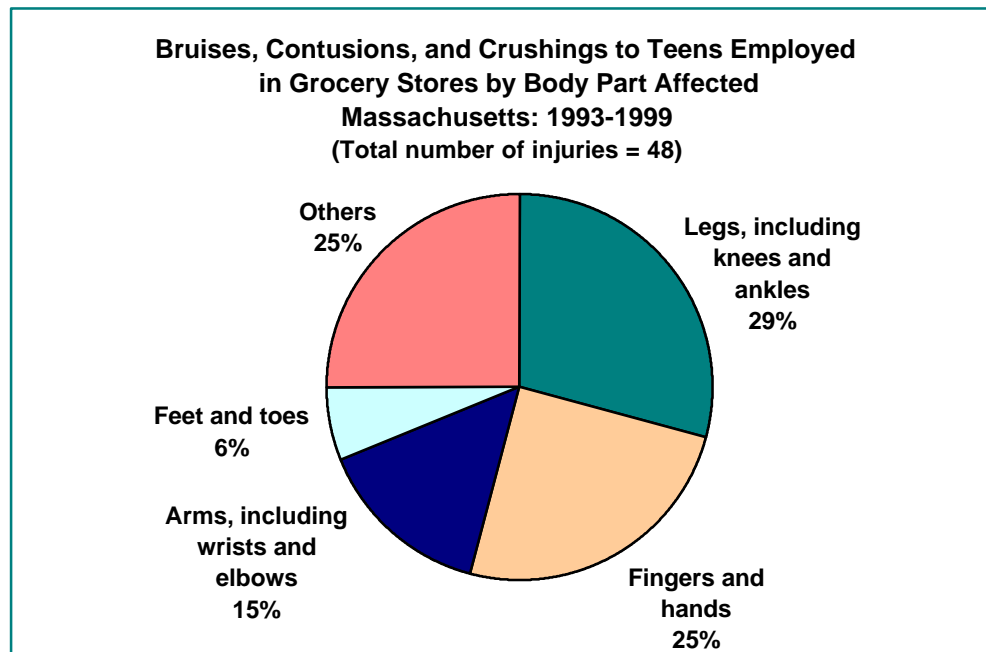
Bruises, Contusions, and Crushings

During a snowstorm I was asked to retrieve carriages from the parking lot. I collected seven carriages and was pushing them up a ramp when I slipped on some ice. I fell onto the curb and bruised myself. Normally I bag groceries, but we are sometimes asked to retrieve carriages when we run out of them.

15-year-old grocery bagger

- More than a third of the bruises, contusions, and crushings affected the lower extremities, including the legs, knees and ankles (29%) and the feet and toes (6%) (**Figure 7**).
- The upper extremities, including the hands and fingers (25%), and the arms, wrists, and elbows (15%) and were affected in 40% of the cases.
- Descriptive information regarding the circumstances of injury was available for 69% (33) of the cases. Slips and falls were listed as the cause of injury for 39% of the cases and being struck by an object was listed as the source of injury for 12% of the cases.

Figure 7.



Source: Massachusetts Department of Public Health, BHSR&E, OHSP

What Injured Teens Have to Say

Teens at Work Project staff completed telephone interviews with 33 young grocery store workers injured on-the-job. While the information from these interviews is not necessarily representative of all young grocery store workers who have been injured, it nevertheless provides some important insights. Of these interviewed teens:

- Seventy percent reported they had received no on-the-job training about how to work safely and avoid injury.
- Twelve percent reported they had no work permits (or educational certificates) for their jobs at the time they were injured. *NOTE: Massachusetts child labor laws require permits or certificates which are obtained through the school district where the teen resides.*
- As a result of their injuries, teens reported their usual activities were curtailed an average of 26 days.
- Seventy percent believed their injuries were preventable.